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CHINESE FIT TRAVELLERS' MARKET IN FINLAND

Case: Visit Finland project

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ABSTRACT

FIT stands for Foreign Independent Tour but nowadays it is used as an acronym for Flexible Independent Travel. FIT travellers are the ones that do not require any land operation providers and they take care of their own arrangements for travel and places to stay, often selling these together as a package. Nowadays it has become the mainstream of travelling.

The author proceeds deductively and use qualitative research approach. The primary data are collected through face-to-face street interviews with total 52 Chinese FIT travellers, which is a good size for qualitative research. The secondary data of the thesis are gathered from reliable sources such as scientific journals, government statistics and literatures.

In this research, theories being employed are tourism industry, tourism marketing and the 4P's of marketing strategy. Also, theories of the customer decision making process are implemented to understand deeply about how consumers make buying decisions. As the final goal is to provide a development plan for Visit Finland, SWOT analysis is used to summarize and analyze the gathered information.

Findings from the study indicate the key elements that affect Chinese FIT travellers' decision making on visiting Finland are recommendation by friends and family, Finnair promotion, the attractiveness of northern lights, well-developed public transportation, cruises stop, TV promotion and celebrities effect. In order to enhance the market, Finnish culture and its unique Sami culture, Finnish design, Finnish Lakeland and cottage are promoted.

Key words

FIT travellers, tourism, Chinese, transportation, Finland, customer decision making, development plan

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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the thesis background, theoretical framework, objectives, research questions and limitations. It also explains the research methodology and data collection.

1.1 Research Background

Tourism is a growing business nowadays in Finland which creates more revenue and employment. According to the statistics, Finland received 7.4 million foreign visitors in 2015 and they brought €2.4 billion to Finland, in which China accounts for €160 million. Based on accommodation statistics 2015, overnight stays by Chinese travellers increased rapidly in 2015, 181.862 overnight stays in total. And in 2016, overnight stays have increased to 271,175. (Statistics Finland 2016, 2.)

Among all those Chinese travellers, FIT travellers are the ones to watch. FIT stands for Foreign Independent Tour but nowadays it is used as an acronym for Flexible Independent Travel. (FIT Travel 2016, 2-3) It is a type of tourism that does not require any land operation providers. Land operation providers, also known as tour operators, are companies that make arrangements for travel and places to stay, often selling these together as package holidays (Cambridge Dictionary 2017). Being FIT travellers, visitors gain more freedom and flexibility on their own travelling plans. It has become the mainstream of travelling.

The author has been studying and working in China before coming to Finland, which equipped her with an understanding of Chinese culture and Chinese customer behaviours. Timetravels Oy is a Finnish tour operator that specializes in “experience travel” to Northern Lapland and Northwest Russia. Currently the author is working in its daughter company Timetravels Incoming Oy which focuses on bringing Asian customers, especially Chinese customers, to Finland. Required by Visit Finland, a project focused on Chinese FIT travellers is carried out. As part of the project team, the author helps to conduct the project, through which it will

deepen the understanding of Chinese FIT traveller's market in Finland and provide a development plan to enhance the market. The data collected for this project are utilized in this thesis.

After acknowledging the situation of Chinese visitors in Finland, the desire of understanding deeply about what and why Finland is so attractive to Chinese visitors, especially FIT travellers has driven the author to conduct this thesis.

1.2 Thesis Objectives, Research Questions and Limitations

The thesis aims to provide the reader the general idea of Chinese FIT travellers' market in Finland, why and what about Finland appeals to them. The final goal is to find out the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities to enhance the market.

Research Questions are the core feature of beginning a qualitative research project (Tracy 2013, 19). Before moving on to any other parts of the research project, it is essential to define a clear research question. A good research question can provide reader with a clear picture of what this research is aiming at. In this study, the research question is:

- What are the key elements that attract Chinese FIT travellers to Finland and how to enhance Finland as an attractive tourist destination for Chinese FIT travellers?

As the research question usually is difficult to answer at once, a researcher can come up with sub-questions to make it easier to cover the whole area of the actual research question (van Thiel 2014, 32). In this study, the following sub-questions comes along:

- What is FIT travellers?
- What factors affect Chinese FIT travellers choosing Finland?
- What can be done to maintain and develop the market?

During the research process, it is inevitable to have limitations. The limitation of this study is that the period of the interview required by Visit Finland is quite short. Since the target group of the study is FIT travellers, the results are not suitable for either group travellers or business travellers. Moreover, it only focuses on the Chinese FIT travellers and the results and suggestions do not apply to other Asian travellers' or other tourism markets.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework demonstrates an understanding of theories and concepts that are relevant to the topic of the research paper and related to the broader areas of knowledge (Trochim 2006, 15). The aim of this thesis is to understand the situation of the Chinese FIT travellers' market in Finland and what kind of marketing strategies can be used to enhance and develop the market. The tourism industry and underlying the customer buying decision-making behind are also being discussed.

Also, this research helps to understand what contributes to making their decision to visit Finland instead of any other countries. The theory of consumer behavior can be applied for.

At the end of the research, a development plan for Visit Finland is provided. The information was gathered with a SWOT analysis, which was conducted by street interviewing Chinese FIT travellers.

1.4 Research Methodology and Data Collection

Research methodology is a systematic way to solve a problem. It is a science of studying how research is to be carried out. Essentially, the procedures by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena are called research methodology. It is also defined as the study of methods by which knowledge is gained. Its

aim is to give the work plan of research. (Rajasekar, Philominathan & Chinnathambi 2013, 20-23.)

Based on the research onion, there are two approaches to conduct the research: deductive and inductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning is starting from a general statement or premise and in the end reaching a logically certain conclusion. In the opposite, inductive reasoning goes from particular statements to general theories. It is reasoning in which the premises are viewed as strongly supplying evidence for the truth of conclusion and it also link premises with conclusions. Deductive reasoning are applied in this research.

Research onion

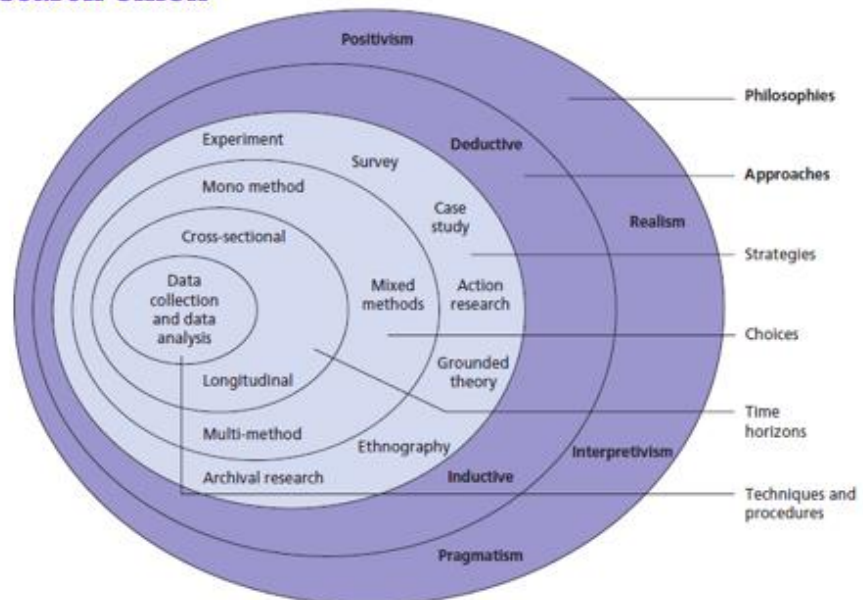


FIGURE 1. Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2009)

Once the research idea is defined, it is time to decide the research method and data collection method. Qualitative research method and quantities research method are the most common and applied ones. Quantitative research is based on the measurement of quantity or amount. Here a process is expressed or described in terms of one or more quantities. The result of this research is essentially a number or a set of numbers.

(Rajasekar, Philominathan & Chinnathambi 2013, 53-54.) It means the

research can formulate facts and potential patterns, which in the end generate the results from a large amount of collected data. Qualitative research is concerned with qualitative phenomenon involving quality. (Rajasekar, Philominathan & Chinnathambi 2013, 54-55.) It looks deeply into "why" and "how" the decision is made and the results of it are descriptive.

The research goal of this thesis is to understand the why the Chinese FIT travellers choose Finland and how to enhance the market. Face-to-face interviews are being conducted for this thesis. Thus, the research method in this study is qualitative research method. After selecting the proper research method, data collection method should be decided. The data serve as the bases or raw material for analysis. Without an analysis of factual data, no specific inferences can be drawn on the questions under study. Inferences based on imagination or guess work cannot provide correct answers to research questions. The relevance, adequacy and reliability of data determines the quality of the findings of a study.

There are two types of sources of data: primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources are original sources from which the researcher directly collects data that have not been previously collected, e.g. interviews, fieldwork, unpublished documents. Secondary sources are sources containing data which have been collected and compiled for another purpose, e.g. newspapers, books, journal articles etc. (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad 2010, 86.) In this thesis, preliminary data is collected by target group interviews. There are total 52 Chinese FIT travellers in Helsinki being interviewed, aiming to find out why they choose Finland as destination and how to enhance the market based on their answers. Literatures, articles and internet based sources regarding tourism, marketing, customer behaviour and Chinese culture are applied as secondary resources. (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad 2010, 87.)

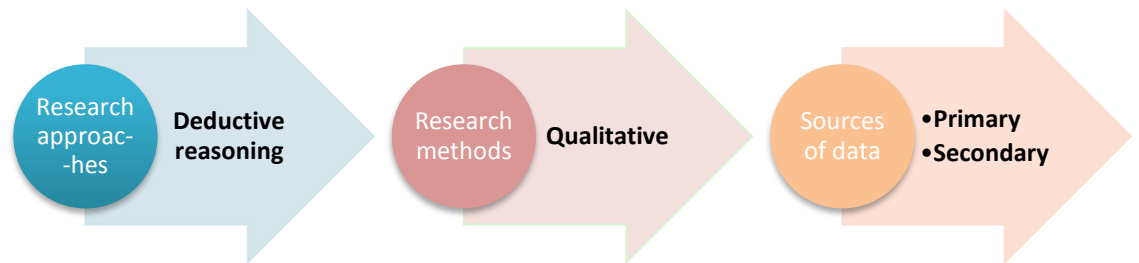


FIGURE 2. Methods of the research

To summarize, the research approach applies for this thesis is deductive reasoning and qualitative research method is used. As for data collection, primary and secondary data is utilized.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis will be divided into two main parts: theoretical part and empirical part. There are 8 chapters in total including introduction and conclusion.

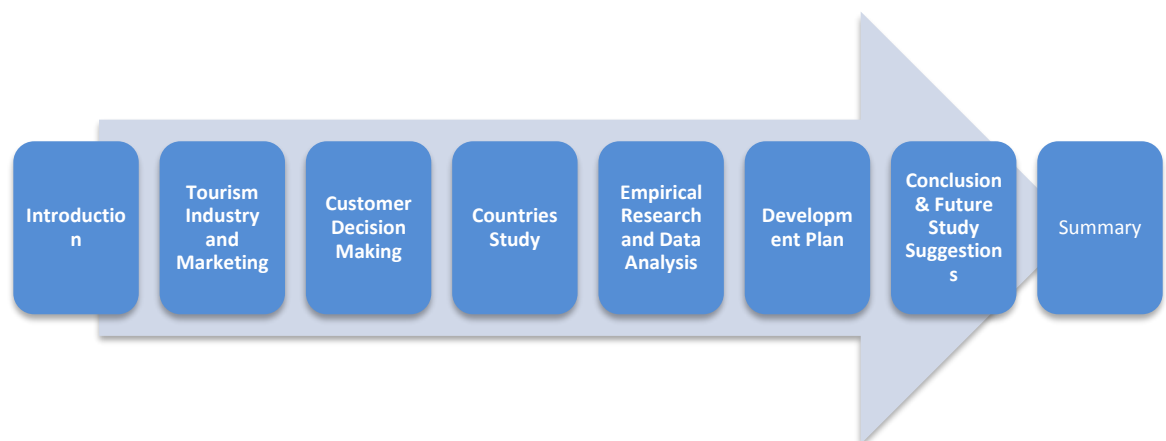


FIGURE 3. Thesis Structure

Introduction present the main ideas of thesis, thesis purpose, research objectives, research methodology, research methods, data collection methods and an outline of thesis structure. Chapter 2 explains the general tourism industry as well as the marketing and marketing strategy such as 4P. Chapter 3 discuss about customer decision making by discussing tourist information searching behavior and customer decision making process.

Chapter 4 looks deeply into Finland as a tourism destination and Chinese outbound tourism situation. It also discusses Chinese tourist searching behaviour and its buying behaviour. Chapter 5 shows how the empirical research is done and goes through data collection methods and data analysis. After analyzing the data, a development plan is presented to show the results of the research in chapter 6. Conclusion can be drawn after the development plan in chapter 7 and suggestions for future study are provided. And the final chapter summarize thw whole thesis.

2 TOURISM INDUSTRY AND MARKETING

This Chapter provide general information of tourism industry. And two more sub-chapters giving more information about Finland as a tourist destination and outbound Chinese tourists' situation. After that, the general idea of marketing and marketing strategy are presented.

2.1 Tourism Industry in General

In its broadest sense, the tourism industry is the total of all businesses that directly provide goods or services to facilitate business, pleasure and leisure activities away from the home environment. Tourism businesses such as hotels, airlines and tour operators represent only a small proportion of the people employed in the tourism industry or who benefit from it. As the tourist dollars trickle down they spread throughout the community and the economy in often surprising ways. (Destination NSW 2017.)

Whether travelling overseas or domestically, travellers use transportation, accommodation, entertainment and meals are all involved. All these consumptions create profit for primary industry e.g. farming; secondary industry such as manufacturing and construction industry as well as tertiary industry such as service industry. In a way, tourism has huge direct or indirect impact on most of other industries.

THE TOURISM SYSTEM

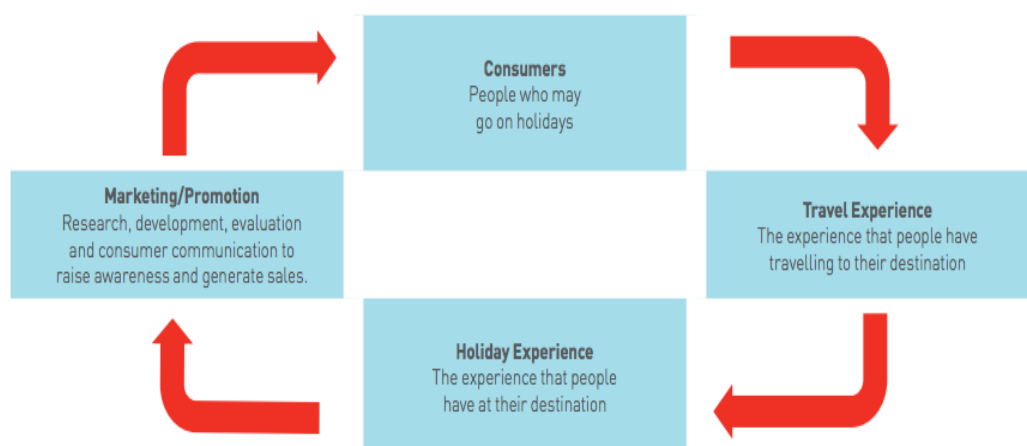


FIGURE 4. The Tourism System (Destination NSW 2017)

There are four elements in this system, which is Customers, Travel experience, Holiday experience and Marketing/Promotion. The consumer is the most important part of the tourism system because the consumer is the reason tourism products and services exist (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill 2004, 80). Consumer is the one who select a destination and may go on holidays domestically or internationally. It is the source of the tourism industry whose demands create opportunities for other industries. To be more specific, consumer chooses a destination and set a budget for this trip, for which he/she will make reservation accordingly. In this case, consumer will create business opportunities for airlines, coaches, hotels, restaurants, safaris providers, etc.

The travel experience relates to how the consumer travels to the destination and the experiences they have along the way (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill 2004, 80). It refers to the way of transportation consumer choose to go to its destinations. It includes airlines, train, coach, car and so on. Travel experience varies according to the budget and destinations which also has an impact on the next element – the holiday experience.

When consumers decide to take a particular type of holiday, they have expectations of the experience they will have (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill 2004, 81). It is not defined by a single factor but many. How satisfied the consumer is can be related to the accommodation quality, restaurant services, entertainment variety and also the cost of the trip. Marketing refers to the multi-faceted process that any successful business perpetually works through (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill 2004, 82). In general, marketing includes market research, consumers and products, business and products development and promotion. It will explain more in subchapter 2.4.

2.2 Tourism Marketing in General

Tourism marketing is the managerial process of anticipating and satisfying existing and potential traveller who wants more effectively than competitive suppliers or destinations. Its management is driven by profit, community gain, core consumer satisfaction as well as securing environmental and societal needs. (Fyall & Garrod 2005, 12.) The basic principle of marketing can be applied to tourism marketing but the current trends should be considered as well. For example, in these few years, northern lights and arctic circle are quite popular among Asian tourists. Also, the new way of travelling, FIT, has been adopted by many Chinese tourists.

Besides making profit and satisfying consumer, it also takes environmental and societal needs into consideration, e.g. not harming environment and local residences while developing tourism resources. One negative example can be Kakslauttanen, the arctic resort which attract thousands of visitors every year with its glass igloos, burning construction waste in a pile of fire while building a new tower block which harms the environment and local residence (Aamulehti 2016). It, of course, cut down the cost but shows the company has a wrong tourism marketing direction.



IMAGE 1. Huomautti yrittäjälle rakennusjätteen polttamisesta – Sai potkut (Aamulehti 2016)

In order to face the future challenges in tourism better, the following factors should be taken into consideration carefully. First of all, new consumers. There will be new consumer segmentation along the development of tourism industry, e.g. in China, graduation trip has become a new trend for students who graduated from high school and turn 18 years old that they are allowed to travel without supervision. Also, with China's economy sharply developing, more and more customers focus on the experiences and quality of life.

Secondly, new technology. The invention of new technology will decrease the number and type of intermediaries. For example, more online travel agencies have appeared on the market in the past few years. Its efficiency and convenience has attracted many travellers signed up their tours.

Thirdly, limits to growth. As the tourism grows, it is difficult to managing its impacts as well as maintain the environment and sustainability (Fyall & Garrod 2005, 13). The example that given about regarding Kakslauttanen arctic resort, they have neglected what the action has done to the environment and it is highly unsustainable. and Last but not least, flexibility in provision. Take the author's hometown Guangzhou as an example. The

72-hour-visa-free transit policy for coastal cities allows Guangzhou's tourism industry and economy boom. More visitors stop by at Guangzhou for sightseeing instead of just staying over in Hong Kong.

2.3 Marketing Strategy

In order to maximize the profit, carrying out effective marketing strategies is essential. Before looking into marketing strategies, it is important to have fully understanding of marketing mix. Marketing mix shows the fact the customers are affected not only by a product itself and in this case encouraging more inquiry into the dynamics of the marketplace, segments and customers (Cheverton 2004, 17). The marketing mix is referring to the series of actions or tactics that a company would use to promote its brand or products in the market. A typical marketing mix consists of 4Ps: Price, Product, Promotion and Place. However, the marketing mix has developed increasingly and it also includes several other Ps like Packaging, Positioning, People and even Politics as vital mix elements. (Fojt 2005, 20.)



FIGURE 5. Marketing mix

The first component of marketing mix is product. A product is an item aiming to fulfill certain needs. It can be tangible or intangible which means

it can be a solid item or a service. Price is an essential part of the marketing mix. It represents the amount a customer is willing to pay for a product. It can determine whether a company will profit from it and survive or not. Adjusting the price of the product affects the entire marketing strategy as well as the sales and demands. The third element is Place which stands for placement or distribution of a product. In order to find out the most effective placing and distribution channels, it is highly important to understand the target market of the product. The last component is promotion which involves sales organization, public relations and advertising. It helps to enhance brand recognition and increase sales. (The Marketing Mix 2017.)

In order to make effective marketing strategies, it is important to learn about the product life cycle.

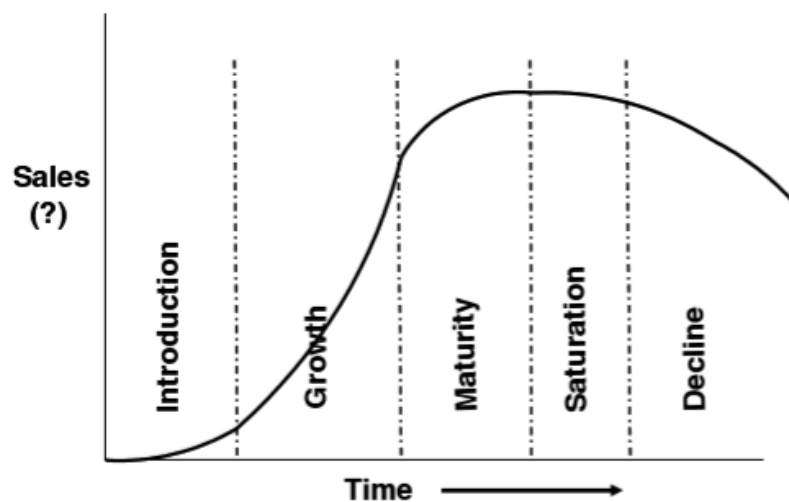


FIGURE 6. Product life cycle (Cheverton 2004)

A product is similar to living creature. It first comes into life which is the introduction phase and then it grows. Slowly it becomes mature and grows old which is saturation phase and finally it dies which means its needs decline from customers. Based on different phases of a product, the marketing strategies varies.

In the introduction phase, there is high investment and slow uptake which means the sales and profits are low of the product while its costs are high. During this period, the strategies are focusing on promotion which is creating awareness for the product. Price shall be premium pricing which means it is set to be higher than similar products. Placement or distribution should be selective which means a small number of retail outlets are chosen to distribute the product. (Cheverton 2004, 19.)

When a product is growing, the sales of this product are increasing rapidly which cut down the costs. In this case, the profit and customers are rising. Within the growing period, it is important for product development and brand building. It often uses market penetration pricing as strategy, through which company use a low price to lure consumers away from its competitors so as to increase its market share. In addition, more distribution channels are involved. (Cheverton 2004, 22.)

During the maturity stage, the product is reaching its sales peak. The continued production in growth period helps to reduce costs and lead to more efficient manufacturing. However, profits start to decrease because of more competitors enter the market. The strategies among this period concentrates on maintain its market share and maximize profits. It also stresses the product benefits and the product price tends to match with other competitors'. (Cheverton 2004, 24.)

At last, the product has reached its sales peak and the sales begins to drop. It has gone to the decline phase. The supplier lose interest and the investment minimize. Eventually, the profits drop to the point where there is no longer profitable to continue producing the product which result in the product soon fade out from the market. The strategy in this period is mainly focusing on reducing costs and rationalize product lines and placement so as to redundant products and extra costs. (Cheverton 2004, 25.)

Form the author's point of view, Finland as a destination for Chinese travellers especially FIT travellers is still new. The outbound tourists to

Finland are increasing rapidly each year, which indicates it is in the growth period. Hence, Visit Finland shall focus on developing Finland's tourism resources and clear branding for Finland. Tour operator ought to use market penetration pricing to set Finland different from other destinations.

3 CUSTOMER DECISION MAKING

This chapter concentrates on customer decision making progress. It introduces general tourist information searching behavior. After that, more information about customer decision making process and consumer buying behaviour.

3.1 Tourist Information Searching Behaviour

Tourists are various and they have different expectations of their ideal vacation. In order to understand tourists' behaviour and help tourism companies market their products more efficiently, obtaining the knowledge of information searching behaviour is essential. It also provides insights for targeting, segmentation and competitiveness. (Pesonen 2013, 21-22.)

Tourism supply needs to be integrated and well-coordinated, including all necessary amenities for an enjoyable stay (Vodeb & Rudez 2010, 17). Only then, potential customers can become clients. Right amount of information available and provided is the key to attract more customers. Information can be divided into two: external and internal information. External information means suppliers of inputs come from outside a business who use sources or information to acquire the inputs into its manufacturing process. It also means that a business is exposed to market price changes in those inputs when producing its goods. Internal information consists of formal and informal sources. Formal sources come from within or outside an organization such as magazines, annual reports and business documents. On the other hand, informal sources include comments and recommendations from associates or relatives. (Business Dictionary 2017.)

Some tourism information can be static or dynamic. Static information is information that is unlikely to be changed or updated for a significant period of time. Example can be given easily, books, maps, tourist attractions information and methods of transportations belong to static information. On the other hand, dynamic information is continuously changing or

updated on a regular basis. Nowadays digitalization, social medias and mobile industry have massive impact on tourism. Schedules, fares and environmental conditions that required frequently updates are tend to be dynamic information. (Benckendorf, Sheldon & Fesenmaier 2014, 33.)

In different stage of a trip, information needs are various. Tourists require different information regarding times and places. In other word, the information needed in pre-trip is different from post-trip. A trip can be divided into three stage: pre-trip, in-trip and post-trip. The table below illustrates what static and dynamic information are required or being used. (Benckendorf, Sheldon & Fesenmaier 2014, 35.)

TABLE 1. Types of Tourism Information Channels (Benckendorf, Sheldon & Fesenmaier 2014)

Trip stage	Static information	Dynamic information
Pre-trip	Brochures, guidebooks, fax, photos ,videos	Phone, email, social media, Internet booking engines
In-trip	Brochures, guidebooks, signs, maps	Phone, fax, email, social media, mobile apps
Post-trip	Brochures, guidebooks, photos, videos	Blogs, social networks, media sharing, reviews

According to the table, both static and dynamic information are in use during the trip. With the aid of mobile apps and online search engines, tourists can search information not only when planning the trip but also during the trip. After the trip, the usage of dynamic information is increasing as tourists are willing to share their experiences or opinions and

more and more tourists tend to rely on “word of mouth”. (Benckendorf, Sheldon & Fesenmaier 2014, 35.)

3.2 Consumer Decision Making Process

Understanding the consumer decision making process is essential as it has impact on all the stages of tourism system and marketing strategies, especially on product and promotion.

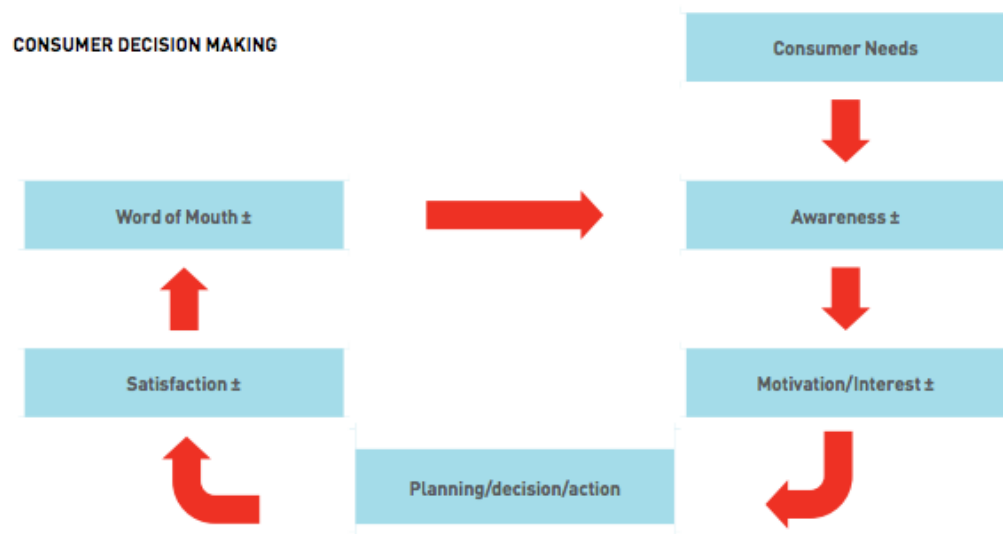


FIGURE 7. Customer Decision Making Process (Destination NSW 2017)

It is a circular process consists of seven parts: consumer needs, awareness, motivation, planning/decision, satisfaction and word of mouth. Consumer needs are priority among other parts, which triggers the buying of products or services (Management Study Guide 2017, 21-22). In tourism, customer needs can be either individuals or with a partners or in groups going on restful holiday in scenic surroundings or to engage extreme sports (Destination NSW 2017).

Awareness, also known as brand consideration or brand awareness, refers to ability of consumers whether they can recognize or recall a brand or product (Business Dictionary 2017). Customers can be aware of a brand with or without buying desire. Awareness can be based on

communications, word of mouth or individual discovery. (Quarterly 2009, 56-58.) Consumers may not recognize their needs for a holiday but effective holiday destinations or services promotion can impress consumers, and as a result it may increase the chances for visiting when consumers need a holiday. Also, it helps to raise awareness among potential travellers of choices available. (Destination NSW 2017.)

Motivation of consumer is the drive to fulfill needs and desires both physiological and psychological through purchasing and usage of products and services. It can be simple as food and water to get rid of hunger or it can be complex as yearning for love. (Sirgy, Rahtz & Dias 2014, 12.) When consumers are aware of and having positive images towards a holiday destination, product or service, it is very likely that they are motivated to pay a visit or choose the product or service (Destination NSW 2017). The stage of planning or decision comes after motivation stage is complete. Once the consumers have decided which destination they would visit, they begin to plan the trip. With the help of promotional information, travelers can decide how to travel to their destination and what they would like to do easier and more convenient. (Destination NSW 2017.)

Tourist satisfaction is a measure of how tourism products and services fulfill or surpass the expectation of tourists (Tardivo, Scilla & Viassone 2014, 14). When a product or service delivers as it promoted to be, travellers tends to feel satisfied and remember a high quality holiday experience. The satisfaction is mutual. Consumers with satisfied travel experiences are likely to give positive reviews which results in tourism providers' satisfaction. Moreover, the satisfaction drives consumers sharing memories and comments with their family and friends which tend to raise awareness of destinations, products or services with potential customers. (Destination NSW 2017.)

3.3 Consumer Buying Behaviour

Consumer buying behaviour is the decision process and act of individuals satisfying their needs and wants, involving in selecting, purchasing, using and disposing goods and services (Singh, Dhayal & Shamin 2014, 35).

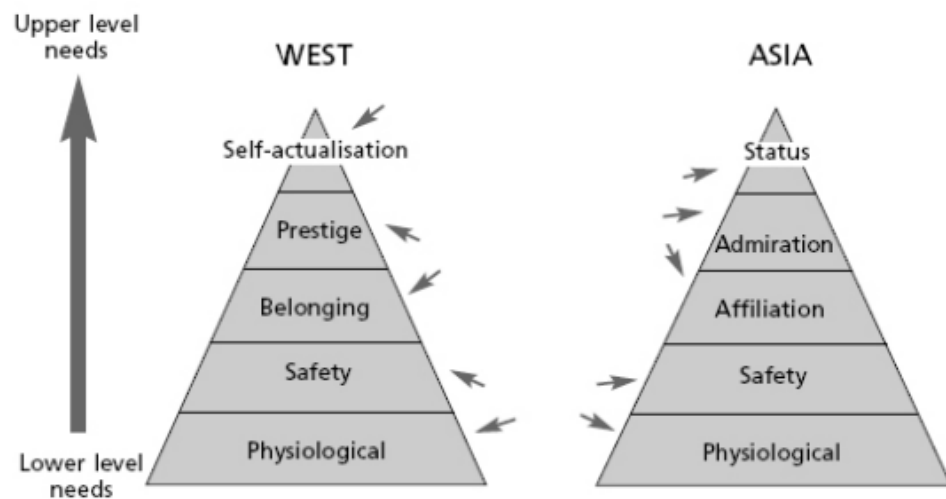


FIGURE 12. Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the Asian equivalent (Roll 2006.)

Maslow's hierarchy of needs represents a hierarchical pyramid with 5 levels: physiological, safety, belonging, prestige and self-actualization. To be brief, Physiological represents the needs of air, food, water, sex, sleep, other factors towards homeostasis, etc. Safety needs includes environment security, employment, health, property and so on. Belonging consists of friendships, love, family, and other relationship. Prestige stands for achievement, respect, self-esteem, etc. Self-actualization represents morality, creativity problem-solving etc. (Roll 2006, 57-60.)

When Asian culture are taken into considerations, the hierarchy of needs changes to physiological, safety, affiliation, admiration and status. It shows that interpersonal relationships and social interaction are more valued than self-actualization in Asian context. Belonging, prestige and self-actualization are shifted to social needs of status, admiration and affiliation. (Li 2010, 2.)

4 COUNTRIES STUDY

This chapter provides the information about Finland as a tourism destination and Chinese outbound tourism situation. It also discusses Chinese tourist searching behaviour and its buying behaviour

4.1 Finland as A Tourism Destination

Finland is known as "the country of a thousand lakes". There are approximately 200,000 lakes as a heritage of geological history, but the lakes are not the only attraction of the Finnish landscape. (Vuoristo 2002, 2.) Working and living in Finland for over 4 years, the author has learnt more about Finland. In Lapland, reindeer herding, northern lights, Santa Claus Village, natural environment, husky safaris and other winter sports are highly appealed to tourists all over the word.

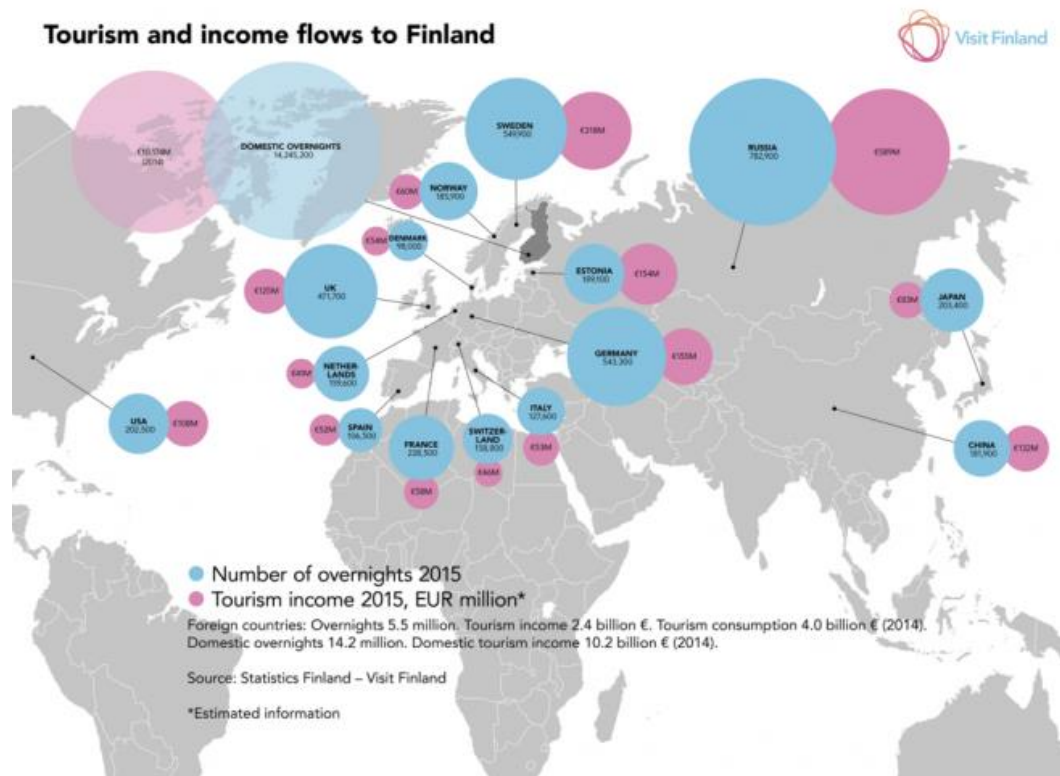


FIGURE 8. Tourism and income flows to Finland (Visit Finland 2015)

According to the Figure 5, Finland received 7.4 million foreign visitors in 2015. Foreign countries contribute 5.5 million overnights and 2.4-billion-

euro income. Tourism has become a significant sector in national economy of Finland. In 2014, tourism generated the value added amounted to 4.4 billion euro, which accounted for 2.5% of Finland's GDP (Visit Finland 2015). Various countries have chosen Finland to be their tourism destination. Based on the accommodation statistics, there are 10 countries contributed the most. Russia (782,848) has the biggest number of all the other countries. Following by the other countries with large amount of overnights: Sweden (549,870), Germany (543,294) and United Kingdom (471,869). The other three countries followed with similar amount are France (230,090), Japan (203,411) and USA (202,546). The rest are the three countries with less amount of overnights: Estonia (188,899), Norway (185,995) and China (181,862).

Finland can be divided into 5 main landscapes regions: Southern Finland, Lake Finland, Ostrobothnia, Vaara Finland and Lapland. (Raivo 2002, 2)



FIGURE 9. Finnish 5 main landscapes regions (Raivo 2002)

(Note: Lappi=Lapland, Vaara-Suomi=Vaara Finland, Pohjanmaa=Ostrobothnia, Järvi-Suomi=Lake Finland, Etelä-Suomi=Southern Finland)

Southern Finland and Lapland are the most popular regions among Chinese tourists. In Southern Finland, travellers are interested in sightseeing in Helsinki such as Helsinki Cathedral and Suomenlinna. In Lapland, tourists are mainly travelling to Santa Claus Village in Rovaniemi and skiing in Saariselkä or Ruka. Having been working in Lapland for the winter season, the author has learnt that Lapland is full of travellers from UK and Asia especially China. Tourists are there to admire the beautiful scenery, magical natural northern lights and mostly to participate in winter sports, e.g. cross-country skiing, husky safaris, ice-fishing, snowshoes safaris and reindeer farm visit.

4.2 Chinese Outbound Tourism

Tourism of China has greatly expanded over the last decade. Domestic tourism has grown 10% annually on average and at the meanwhile, inbound tourism has increased by 10% in total in year 2013. The largest growth was witnessed in China's outbound tourism industry. (EU SME Centre 2014.) In 2014, there are 120 million outbound Chinese tourist and it increased by 12% according to the statistic from China National Tourism

Administration 2015.

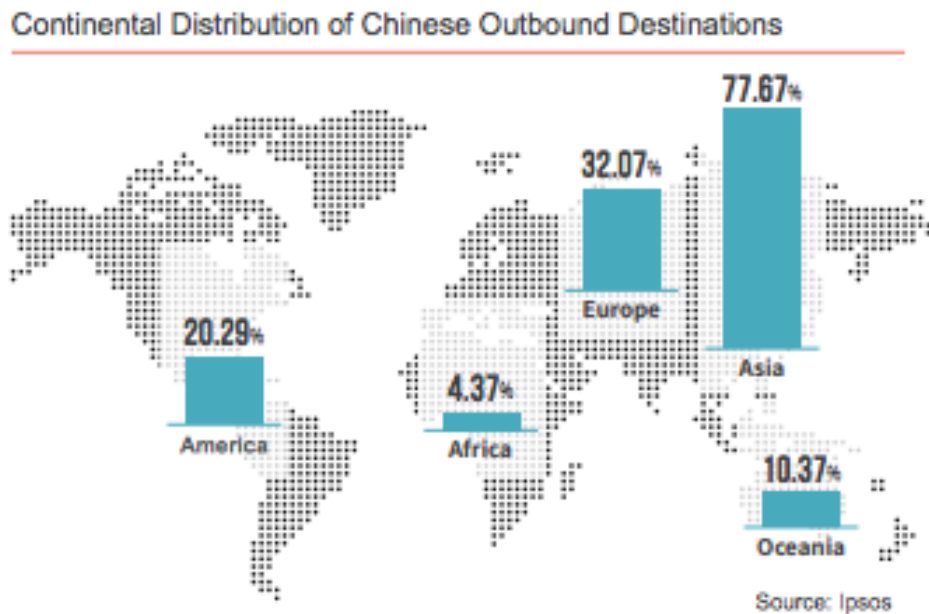


FIGURE 10. Continental Distribution of Chinese Outbound Destinations (Ipsos 2015)

Their travel destinations are all over the world. Ipsos has conducted a survey in 2015 regarding Chinese outbound tourist (city) consumption. According to the survey, Chinese tourists preferred Asian destination (77.67%) the most, followed by Europe (32.07%) and America (20.29%). Less tourists chooses to go to Oceania (10.37%) and the least goes to Africa (4.37%). In the top two popular destinations, South Korea and Japan are the most popular countries in Asia; In Europe, France, UK and Italy are highly preferable by Chinese tourists (Ipsos 2015, 2.)

How does Chinese tourists choose their destinations? Based on the Ipsos survey result, 74.64% of the interviewees relied on the internet. The internet here refers to traditional internet searching engines like Google as well as social media channel such as WeChat and Weibo. These interviewees tend to rely on internet for information about the destinations. However, the other 44.12% are influenced by" word of mouth", which means these tourists rely on their family and friends when choosing their destination instead of searching the internet. (Ipsos 2015, 3.)

4.3 Chinese Tourist Searching Behaviour

By the end of 2015, there are over 5.66 billion Chinese using searching engines. Majority of users (94.6%) are using it for information research and 84.4% are using it specifically for tourism information research. A large group of users (77%) are using online websites such as Baidu.com and Sogou.com and 38.2% out of the 77% users are browsing travelling websites. However, 33% of users prefer searching information through different mobile applications. In addition, 31.4% out of the 33% mobile applications users are using it for travelling planning and booking. (China Internet Network Information Center 2016.)

TABLE 2. Chinese Tourists' Daily Information Searching Behaviour (Hu, Su & Zhang 2014)

Item	Item classification
Frequently-used websites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ctrip.com 45.5% - LY.com 25.5% - Mangocity.com 14% - Aoyou.com 11.3% - Others 3.7%
Weekly frequency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less than 1 time 33% - 1-2 times 39% - 3-5 times 19% - 6-9 times 3.5% - Over 10 times 5.5%
Duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less than 15 minutes 19.3% - 16-30 minutes 42.1% - 31-60 minutes 25.5% - 61-120 minutes 8.2% - Over 120 minutes 4.9%

Frequently-used searching engines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Baidu 59.3% - Google 8% - Sogou 16.4% - Soso 8% - Yahoo 6.2% - Others 2.1%
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Table 2 illustrates Chinese tourists' daily information searching behaviour. As we can see from the table, Chinese tourists prefer surfing in travel websites for information gathering. Ctrip.com takes up the most, 45.5% of 451 interviewees choose to visit there while LY.com stands the second place with 25.5% interviewees. These two websites are now becoming the major travel websites. Mangocity.com and Aoyou.com have smaller number 14% and 11.3% respectively.

There are 39% tourists visiting travel websites 1-2 times a week and 33% of them visit travel websites less than 1 time. This indicates even though tourism e-business is developing rapidly, the visiting rates are still low which shows China's internet penetration is not enough and the false system in China's holiday system. In China, western holidays like Easter and Christmas do not apply which leads to Chinese tourists can only travel during Spring Festival and China's National Day where they have long holidays.

Most of the Chinese tourists (59.3%) choose Baidu to search travelling information which is way exceeding other searching engines. Only small amount of Chinese tourists uses Sogou (16.4%), Soso (8%), Yahoo (6.2%) and Google (8%). This indicates the current searching market are dominated by Baidu. Travelling agencies are highly likely to run their advertisement on the major websites so as to attract more customers. It is also due to the fact that Google is banned in China. Very few Chinese tourists can have access to it unless they use Virtual Private Network to escape the firewall.

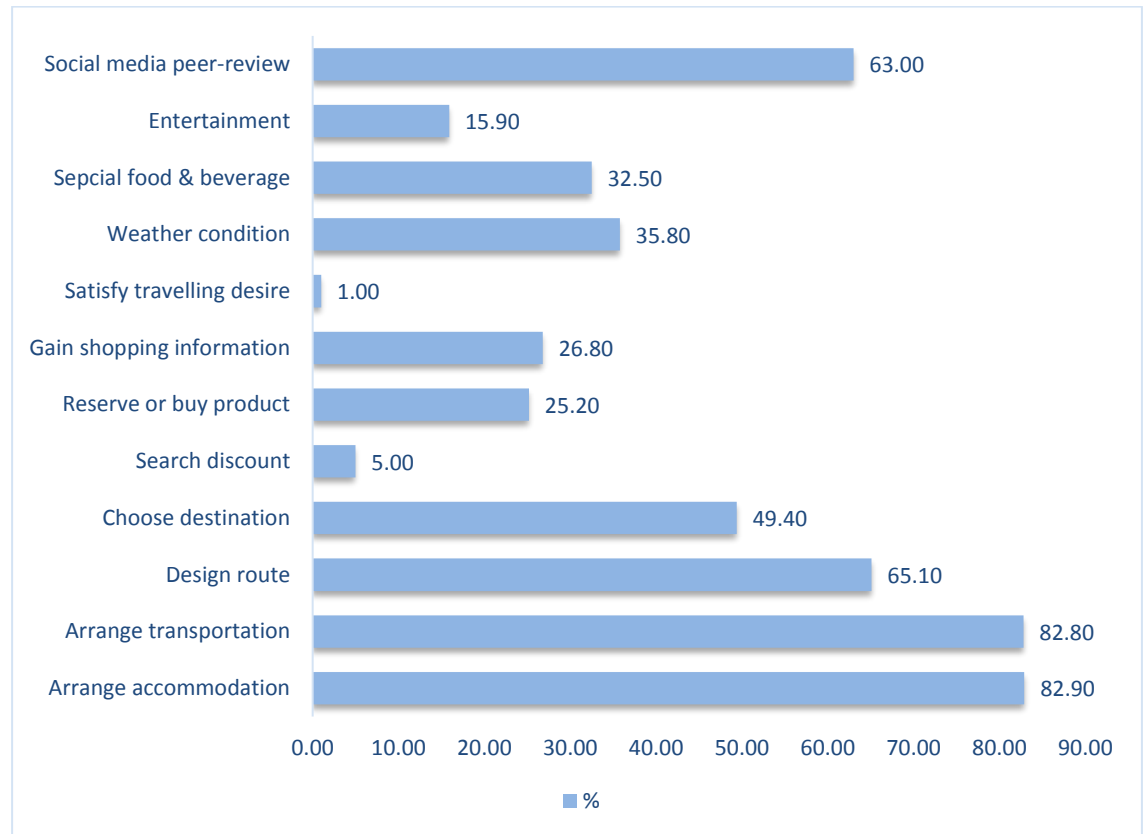


FIGURE 11. Daily Searching Behaviour of Chinese Tourists (Hu, Su & Zhang 2014)

Based on the Figure 11, Chinese tourists are highly interested in searching information on accommodation (82.9%) and transportation (82.9%) arrangements. It shows that Chinese tourists information searching are driven by planning motivation. The second and third object that the Chinese tourists search the most are travelling route designing (65.1%) and social media peer reviews (63%) which indicates that Chinese tourists rely on "word of mouth". Others cares for local special food and beverage (32.5%), weather conditions (35.8%), shopping information (26.8%) and entertainment (15.9%). Less of them search information aiming to satisfy travelling desire (1%) or sales discount (5%).

4.4 Chinese Customer Buying Behaviour

Generally speaking, Chinese consumers develop shopping behaviour in their youth and these habits tends to remains throughout adulthood.

Elderly consumers, e.g. born before 1960, tend to value price over quality due to the fact that they grew up in tough political and economic times compared to the new generations. Middle-aged Chinese consumers born after 1960 are still price-oriented but also affected by new buying trends. On the other hand, younger generations, age between 20 to 25, are more likely to pay premiums for higher-end products. In other words, the older generation, in general, maintains their traditional buying behaviours, middle-aged Chinese are torn between tradition and new trends, and younger generation evolved to be more Westernized and quality conscious. (Nelson 2011, 1.)

Over 1.1 billion tourists travelling in 2014, including about 100 million Chinese tourists. The main reason of Chinese tourists travelling is shopping. Chinese consumers generally have strong preference for foreign brands. Chinese tourists tend to choose developed countries as destinations such as Italy and France because of luxury products. The price of luxury products is up 30% to 50% expensive compared to the ones in western European countries, which has strongly driven Chinese tourists travelling there. Other countries like Maldives or Spain are also being chosen for its beaches and romantic stays. (Meriaux 2014, 1.)

“Face” in Asian countries is highly valued, especially in China. “Face” can be associated with dignity, honor, prestige, one’s social status etc. (Hwang 1987, 15.) First behaviour to be notice is that when purchasing goods or services either for friends or relatives, Chinese consumers tend to choose those with appropriate value and particularly pay extra attention to product packaging. Those who cannot afford higher-quality gift always choose the products with fanciest and nicest packaging within the affordable price range. The fancier the packaging looks, the more “face” Chinese consumers will gain when giving it to their friends or relatives. (Meriaux 2015, 1.) Generally, one’s individual income is not observed by others. Those who have higher income tend to select higher-quality products or services in order to enhances their social status. In another word, showing off their wealth and social status. (Grilo, Shy & Thisse 2001, 20-21.)

Second typical behaviour of Chinese consumers is conformity. Conformity is defined as the tendency that people have to comply with the group norm while making decisions (Ghazzai 2012, 92). It means that when consumer making choices of goods or services, it is likely that they want to be accepted or liked by certain groups or social networks. Therefore, consumers follow trends so as to prevent social ostracism, and even hope to gain more identification. (Luo 2009, 26-27.) Same rules apply for Chinese tourists. Whenever a new destination is being promoted by TV shows or celebrities, Chinese tourists tend to travel there in order to fulfill their desire of being "cool" or envious by others and also fit in the mainstream.

5 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

The chapter familiarizes the reader with the empirical research conducted for this thesis, after which the results obtained from the research are analyzed. Face-to-face interview is implemented as the author and its project workers interviewed random Chinese FIT travellers in popular Helsinki attraction sites. Results gained from the interview are used as information and analyzed. The questions of the interviews can be found in the Appendix 1.

5.1 Design and Formulation of the Empirical Research

“Empirical” means something is based on, concerned with or verifiable by observation or experience rather than theory or pure logic (Oxford Dictionary 2017). Empirical research can be defined as a research that based on observation or experiment. These kind of researches are often conducted to test hypothesis.

As briefly mentioned in the introduction chapter, research methods can be divided into qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative research explains phenomena by collecting numerical data which are analyzed using mathematically-based methods. It enables researchers to estimate future events or quantities. Qualitative research connects to people’s opinions, feelings and experiences. It provides in-depth information regarding certain human behaviours. Qualitative research methods only describe and help to understand the situation but do not attempt to change it. (veal 2011, 40-45.) For this research, qualitative research methods are implemented as the researcher, together with the project workers, interviewed only Chinese FIT travellers in in popular Helsinki attraction sites.

As the target group is Chinese FIT travellers, the research was done interviewing only Chinese FIT travellers in popular Helsinki attraction sites. The purpose is to understand deeply about what and why Finland is so attractive to Chinese visitors, especially FIT travellers and provide a

development plan to enhance the market for Visit Finland. The interviewing languages were Mandarin Chinese and Cantonese and the interview questions were in simplified Chinese. A translated version can be found in appendix so as to be more reader-friendly.

The interview consists of four types of questions: warm-up questions, main topic and conclusion questions. Warm-up questions are mainly about Chinese FIT travellers themselves. Main topic is focusing on the details information such as transportation, culture, entertainment, etc., of Finland, especially Helsinki. Conclusion questions are asked about general impression Finland especially Helsinki.

5.2 Data Collection

Data collection methods are various, such as observation, interview, mail survey, experimentation, simulation and projective technique. The data collection used in this study is interview which involved face-to-face conversation between the researcher and respondents. The following Figure 12 illustrates the stages of data collection. (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad 2010, 90.)

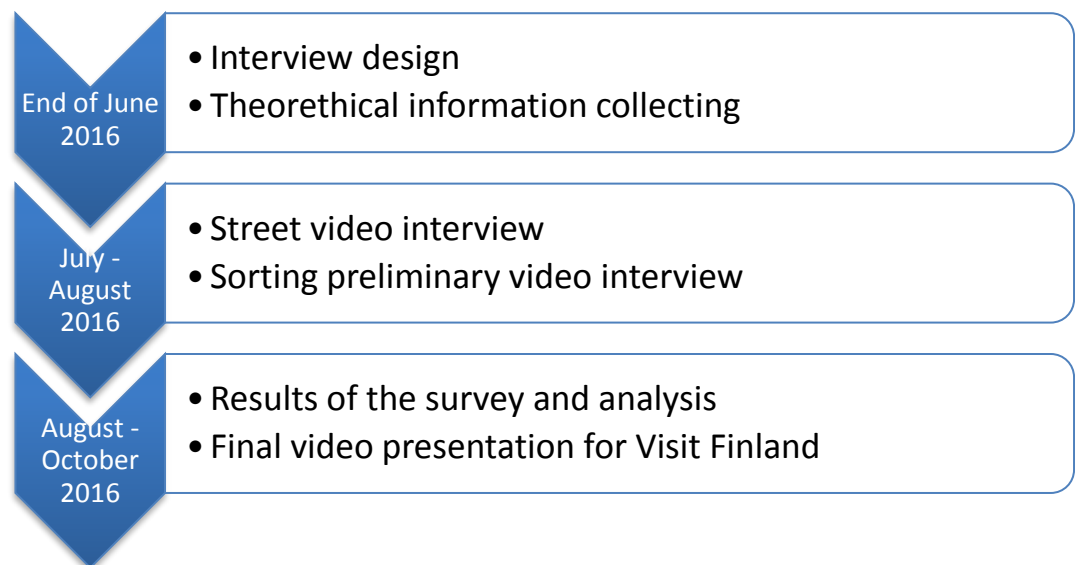


FIGURE 12. The process of collecting data.

The interview completed in the end of October 2016. The researcher visited popular sightseeing sites such as Helsinki Cathedral and Suomenlinna from July to August to interviewing Chinese FIT travellers. Results of the interview are being used in the thesis. In the end of February 2017, the writing process of the thesis has begun. The first step was gathering theoretical information such as marketing, tourism marketing, marketing strategy, country studies of China and Finland, Chinese tourists searching behaviour and their decision making process.

Totally 52 Chinese FIT travellers have been interviewed, which is enough to analyze the results. Since the street interviews had limited time, not all the interview questions were answered by the respondents. The main questions chosen are regarding transportation, culture and the FinRelax programme.

5.3 Data Analysis

The analysis of data is the most skilled task in the whole research which requires researcher's judgement and skills. It helps to summarize data into understandable and meaningful form. (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad 2010, 161.) The questions that are crucial to the study have been answered by the interviewees and these questions will be explained and analyzed in this chapter.

The first interview question is concerning the geographic of the respondents. Most of the interviewees are from coastal cities, Guangzhou, HongKong, Shanghai, Qingdao, Tianjin, Hangzhou and Taipei. The biggest group consist of 10 is from Guangzhou and the second largest group with 7 interviewees is from Hong Kong. Less of tourists are from inland cities like Suzhou, Maoming and Xi'an. One thing to be noticed in the other catalogue is that there are 2 respondents are European Chinese and American Chinese. Figure 13 below illustrates the city distribution of

Chinese FIT travellers.

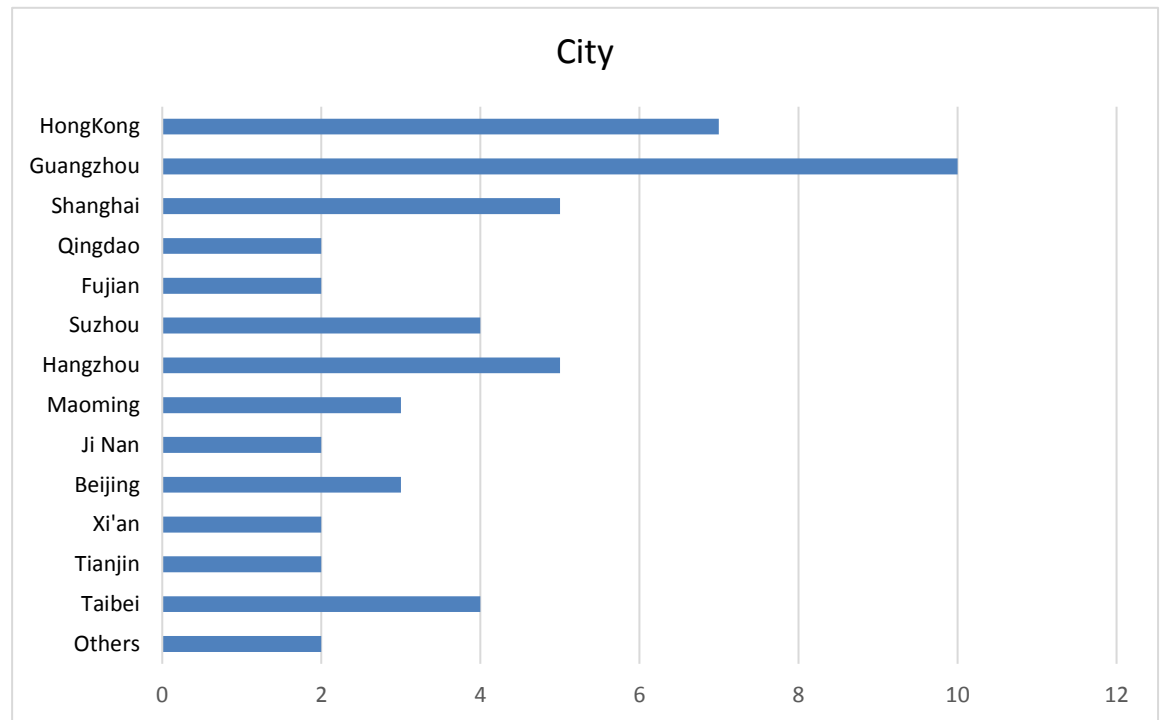


FIGURE 13. City distribution of Chinese FIT travellers.

The third question is focusing on the travelling methods of how the respondents travel to Finland. Figure 14 shows the travelling methods of the interviewees towards Finland. Based on the results, 66% out of 53 respondents choose to fly to Finland while 34% of them are using cruises.

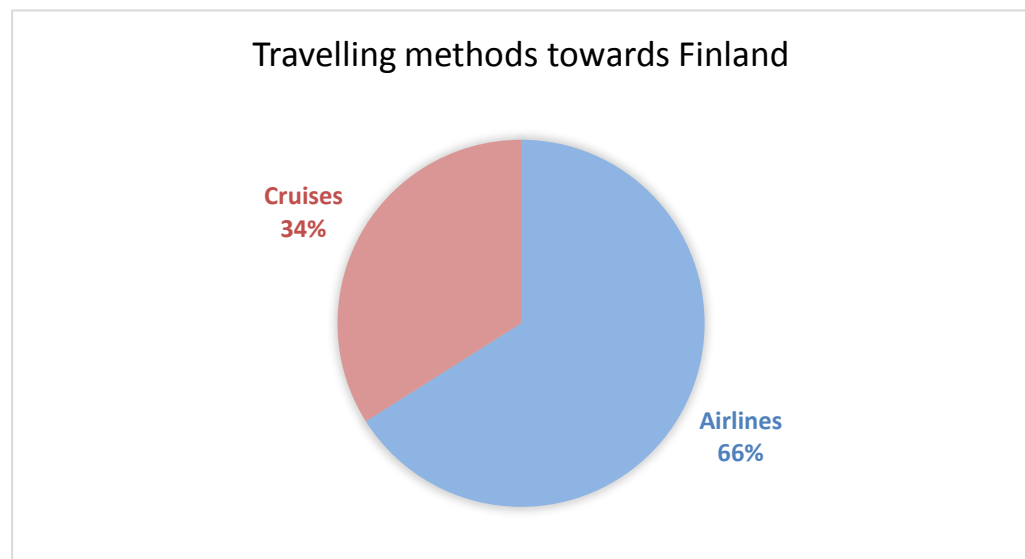


FIGURE 14. Travelling methods towards Finland.

After having a general picture of city distribution of tourists and the travelling methods they used, let's move on to the duration of them staying in Finland. Large amount of respondents (30) stay in Finland for less than a day, most likely 6 hours. And 14 of them stay in Finland for one day and then travel to the next destination. Similar number of the rest interviewees stay in Finland for 2-3 days, 3-4 days or 4-5 days. Three out of the interviewees stay in Finland more than five days. Figure 15 below presents the Chinese FIT tourists staying duration in Finland.

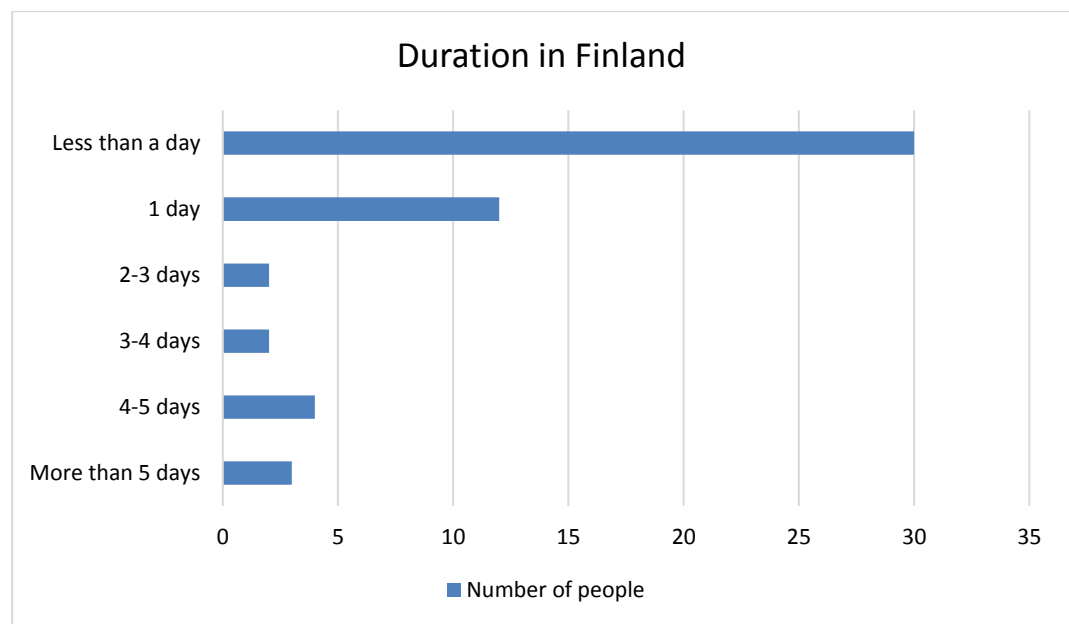


FIGURE 15. Duration in Finland.

The sixth question asked is about which cities Chinese FIT travellers prefer to visit during their stay. Figure 16 shows the distribution of cities visited by Chinese FIT travellers. Since the street interview was taken in Helsinki, the respondents were all visited or going to visit Helsinki. Besides Helsinki, seven other cities were chosen by Chinese FIT travellers. Based on the results, 42% of the respondents stated they were not planning to visit another city. Espoo (17%) and Tampere (13%) were the most popular among Chinese FIT travellers. Porvoo and Rovaniemi were less attractive to them with 6 and 5 people respectively. Minority of them also visited Savonlinna, Oulu and Turku.

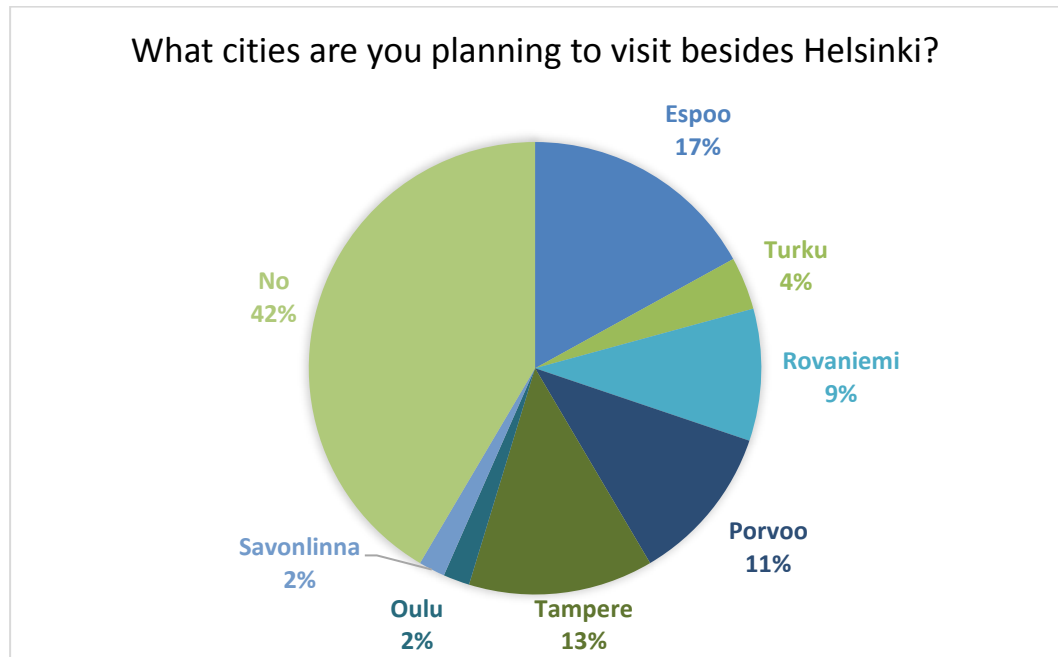


FIGURE 16. Visited cities by Chinese tourists.

The eighth question concerns with the reason why Chinese FIT travellers chose Finland as destinations. The biggest group, 41% of the interviewees, chose Finland due to the fact that Finnair has promotion on direct flight to Helsinki. Also, 25% the respondents chose Finland relying on their friends or colleagues' recommendation and 21% of the interviewees stated that it is the attractiveness of northern lights that drove them here. In addition, 17% visited Finland because it is the stop of their cruises and 6%. Also, there are 2% of the respondents visited Finland because of a volunteer programme for refugees in Oulu. Least of the interviewees chose Finland for its nature and culture. Figure 17 shows the reasons why they choose to visit Finland.



FIGURE 17. Reasons of choosing Finland as destination.

Figure 18 above represents the Chinese FIT travellers' opinions towards Helsinki public transportation. Most of the respondents (34%) considered Helsinki public transportation to be convenient with day ticket and 15% of the respondents thought it was rather convenient compared to the transportation in northern Finland. In total, 49% of the interviewees are generally satisfied with the public transportation in Helsinki. And the price is acceptable according to 24% of the interviewees. However, 27% of the interviewed Chinese FIT travellers found it rather confusing while using buses because the stops' name was not showing in the buses.

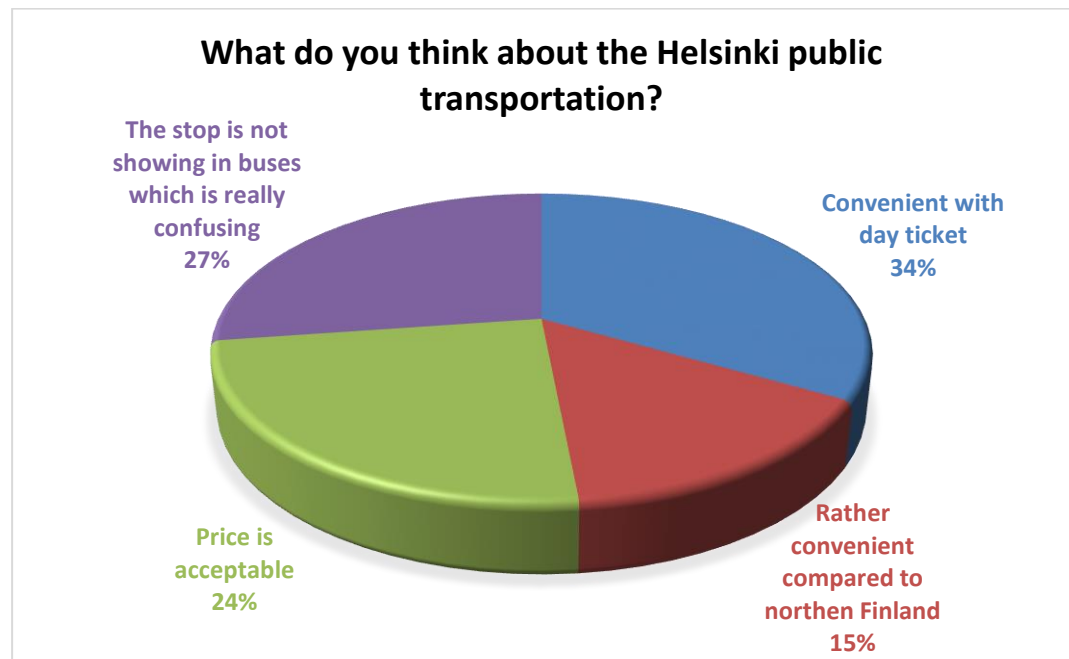


FIGURE 18. Opinions towards Helsinki public transportation.

Next question is concerning Finnish cultures, asking if the interviewees have learnt about Finnish cultures before they visited Finland. Minority of the respondents (5 out of 53 people) considered Finnish culture is not the same as Scandinavian mainstream cultures. Also, 15 of the interviewees haven't learnt anything regarding Finnish culture before they travelled here. Majority of the respondents (33 out of 53 people) only learnt a little about Finnish culture. They have mentioned the design brand Itala, the designer Alvar Aalto, Santa Claus from Rovaniemi and Finland's involvement in World War II. Some of them even compared Chinese with Finnish saying that Finnish were rather shy and reserved.

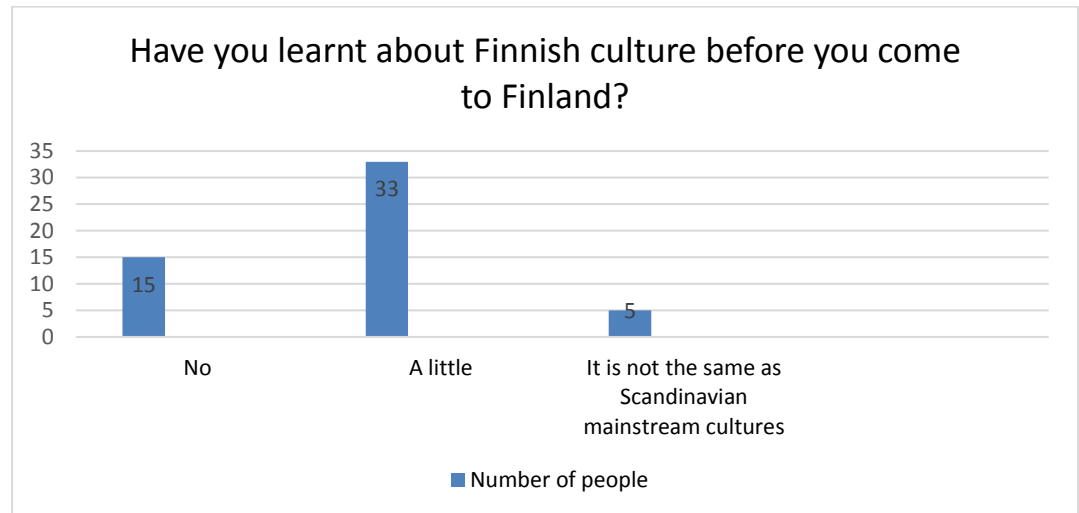


FIGURE 19. Opinions towards Finnish culture.

The payment methods they used in Finland includes cash, credit card, debit card, WeChat and Alipay. Most of the Chinese FIT travellers (22 out of 53 people) prefer cash payment over the other options. And 14 of them choose to pay with debit card while 10 interviewees prefer credit card payment. Figure 20 below shows the preference of Chinese FIT tourists' payment methods.

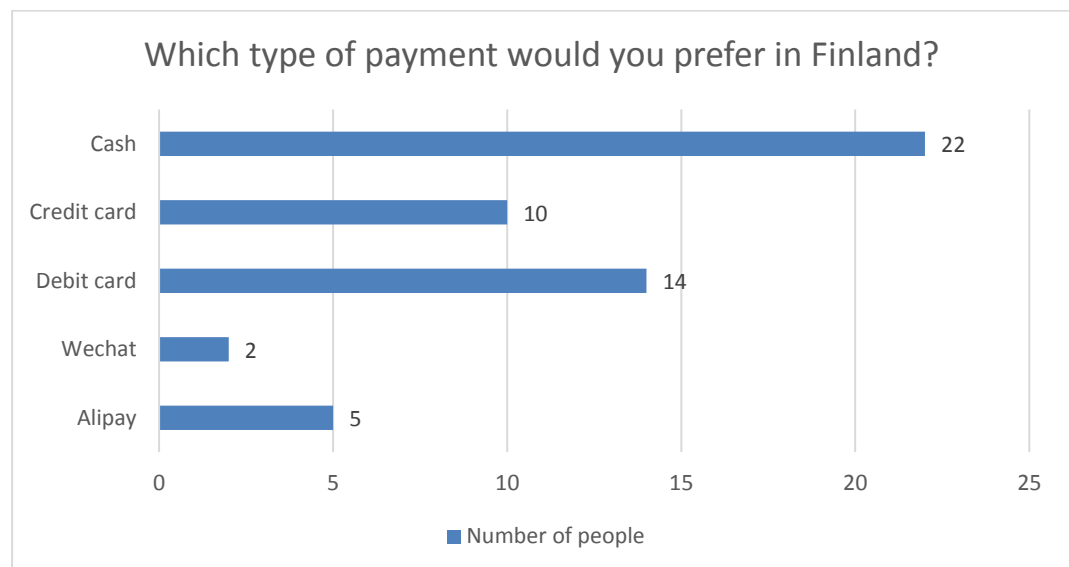


FIGURE 20. Payment methods preference.

Figure 21 below illustrates Chinese FIT travellers' preference of FinRelax programme. Over half of the respondents (64%) were interested in Finnish

sauna. In addition, 13% of the interviewees were interested in pure Finnish nature and 9% of them were fond of the high quality water. Other than that, 4%, 6% and 4% of the respondents had interest in lakeland experience, cottage life and peace and serene respectively.

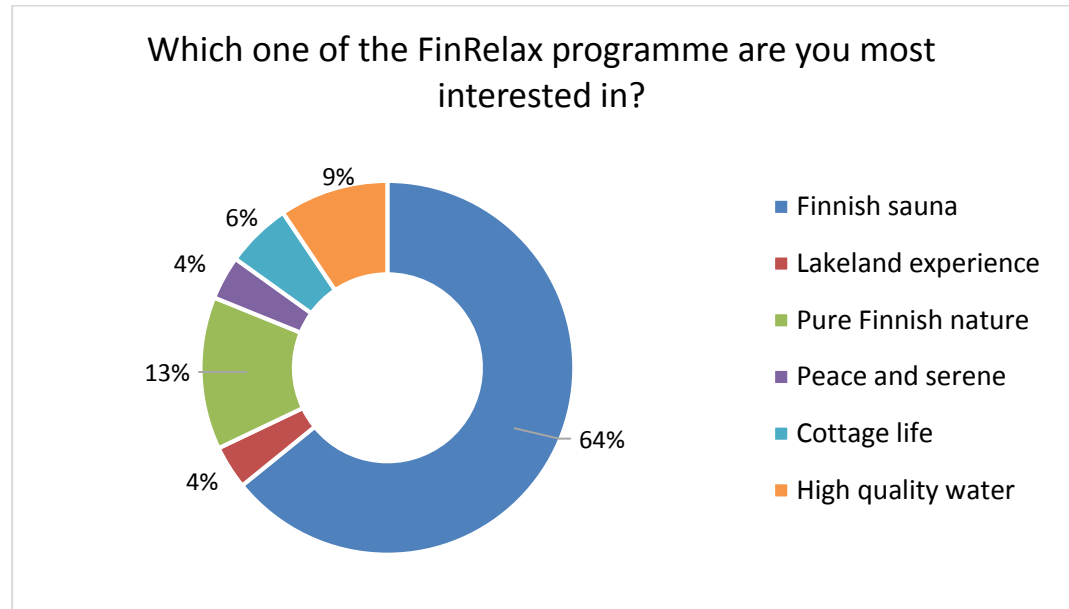


FIGURE 21. Chinese FIT travellers' preference of FinRelax programme.

The next question is concerning Chinese FIT travellers' impression on Finland. Based on the interview result, most of the descriptions are positive but four interviewees said that they were frustrated because of the raining weather in Finland. Most of the respondents were impressed by the comfort environment (12 out of 53 people), good air condition (11 out of 53 people) and beautiful surroundings (10 out of 53 people). Some interviewees described Finland as a country of design (2 out of 53 people), a typical coastal city (2 out of 53 people), relaxing atmosphere (5 out of 53 people) and rather cold weather in late summer (7 out of 53 people). Figure 22 below represents Chinese FIT travellers' impression on Finland.

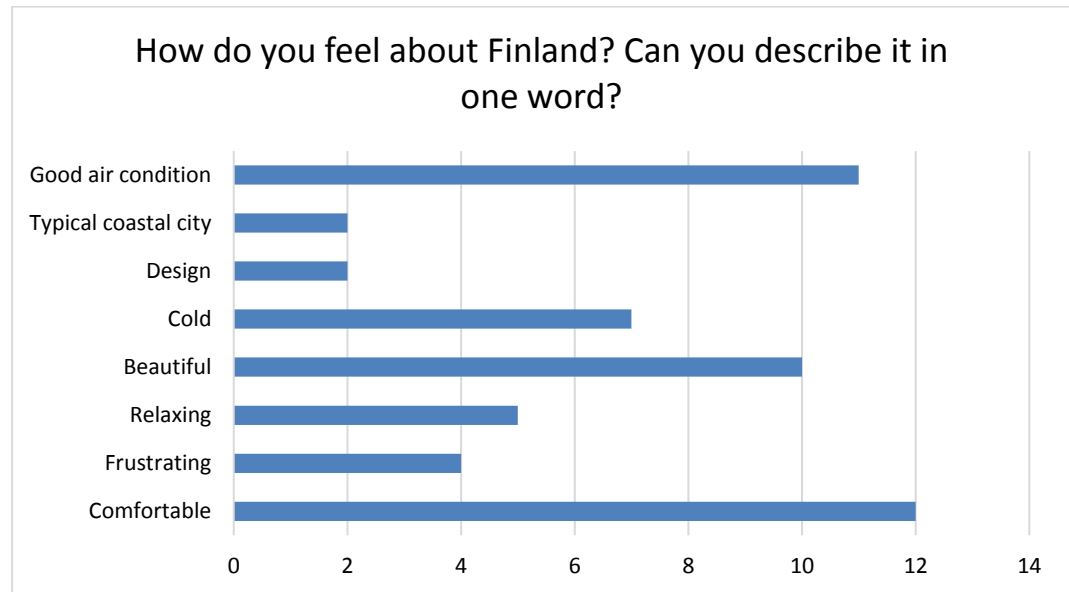


FIGURE 22. Chinese FIT travellers' impression on Finland.

Figure 23 below represents the tendency of Chinese FIT travellers' to recommend Finland. Majority of them (41 out of 53 people) responded positively promising to recommend Finland to their friends and family. Only two of the interviewees said no due to the fact that they only spent a couple of hours in Helsinki and the weather was bad. The rest of the interviewees would only recommend Finland as a stop in the way but not the final destination or only destination.

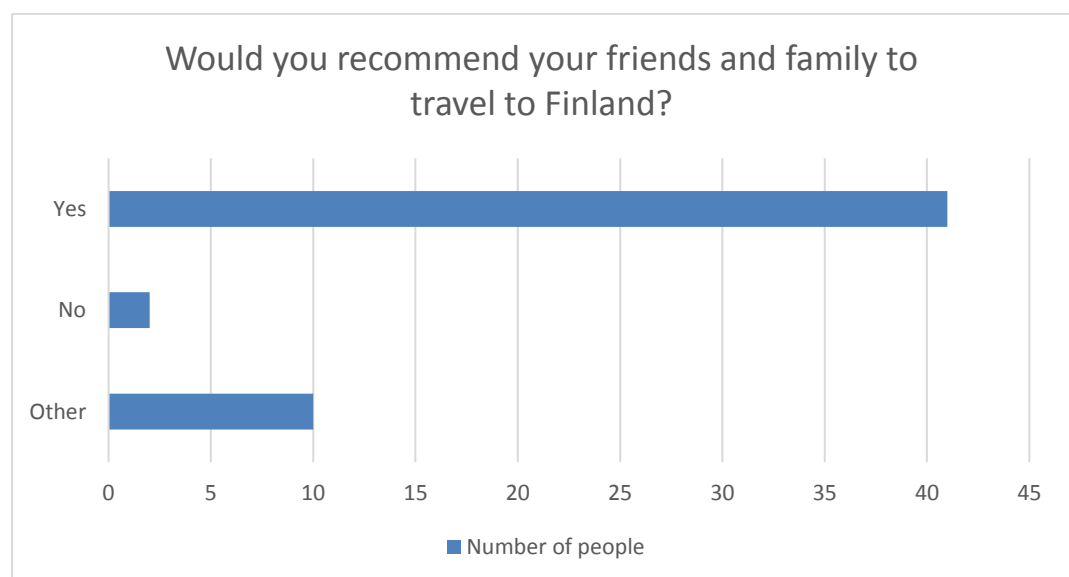


FIGURE 23. Chinese FIT travellers' tendency to recommend Finland.

6 DEVELOPMENT PLAN

After the author has familiarized with the theoretical concept of marketing, especially tourism marketing, tourism in general, Chinese customers searching behaviours and their decision making process, countries study of China and Finland and collected all the interview results, it is time to conduct a development plan for Visit Finland. The development plan consists of SWOT analysis which analyzes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of public transportation, culture and FinRelax programme. Results from the interview are used to support the findings in the development plan in this chapter.

6.1 SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is a smart tool and a useful technique to organize external and internal factors that have an impact on a project, product, place or person. SWOT analysis consists of four factors: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Strengths and weaknesses can be seen as internal factors and opportunities and threats as external information. SWOT analysis helps to develop full awareness of the situation which in favor of both strategic planning and decision-making. (Miles, Huberman & Saldana 2014.)

The SWOT analysis is organizing the information about strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to public transportation, culture and FinRelax programme. The analysis is based on both theoretical and empirical research conducted for this thesis. Results of the SWOT analysis can be seen in the tables below which are followed by more detailed explanations.

TABLE 3. SWOT analysis on public transportation.

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Convenient network - Days transportation packages - Less time consuming - Convenient taxi service - Price are acceptable - Stops in sightseeing attractions 	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inconvenient street signs - Unclear bus stops signs - Not all the bus is equipped with screen showing the stops.
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Renovate all the bus with proper bus stops notifications. - Provide Chinese transportation services, e.g. timetable in Chinese 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pre-booked coach services - Gasoline price rises

Table 3 reveals the pros and cons regarding public transportation. The strengths of Helsinki public transportation exceeded its weaknesses. Even though for some tourists the signs and stops were not clear enough, it is still convenient and affordable especially compared to the transportation in northern Finland. The planning of city transportation needs to focus on the weaknesses part since FIT travellers are not using any tour operators or land operators and depend all on themselves.

TABLE 4. SWOT analysis on culture.

<p>Strengthens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Well-known as a country of design - Known as the official hometown of Santa Claus - Famous for Finnish Sauna - Travellers can experience two different cultures (Russian and Finnish) - Finnish people have very good reputation to Chinese FIT tourists 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not enough promotion - Finnish people are rather shy and reserved - Too reserved culture and people cannot arouse the interest of Chinese travellers - Finnish people are rather friendly compared to Russians
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting Finnish design - Promoting Finnish sauna - Promoting Finnish Sami culture 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other countries are also claiming they are the hometown of Santa Claus

Table 4 illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of Finnish culture. According to the interview results, Finnish culture is still not well-known to Chinese FIT travellers. The respondents only knew little about Finland such as sauna and the hometown of Santa Claus. Finnish people are rather shy and reserved which makes Chinese FIT travellers feel distanced. Based on the fact that Finnish culture is less-known, it is time to promote more on sauna, Finnish design and unique Sami culture.

TABLE 5. SWOT analysis on FinRelax programme.

Strengthens <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting the pure nature and sauna - Presenting the 6 most typical attractions in Finland 	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not enough of promotion cause most of Chinese travellers have not heard about it. - Too relaxing programmes does not arouse the interest of Chinese travellers
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use more Chinese social media channels to promote the programme, e.g. WeChat, Weibo. 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other countries have been promoting more high-end and interesting programmes.

Table 5 analyzes the FinRelax programme. Since this programme is meant to attract more Chinese FIT travellers to Finland, it is crucial to understand its pros and cons. Promoting the pure nature, sauna and lakeland experience which represents distinctive Finland are wise. However, the programmes were too relaxing and resting which does not suit Chinese FIT travellers' taste. Also, other countries are offering more high-end products that fit Chinese FIT travellers' buying preference.

6.2 Development Plan

With all that is on offer, one of the main challenges facing tourism operators is to develop and package tourism products in a way that meets consumer needs, enabling the creation of a viable business (Destination NSW 2017). The purpose of the thesis is to implement a development plan for Visit Finland in order to attract more Chinese FIT travellers to Finland and enhance the market.

In short term planning, within 1- 4 years, it should concentrate on familiarization. Finland is still a rare destination for most Chinese travellers, especially FIT travellers. Nowadays the quality of the customer journey is depending more and more the availability of digital information. Implements of the digital infrastructure are necessary when it comes to supporting information searching for FIT travellers. Efforts have been made on major websites in Chinese language such as visithelsinki.fi and visitfinland.com. However, the information provided in Chinese is still less than the ones in English or Japanese. Chinese mainstream social media should be taken into consideration as well since majority of the Chinese FIT travellers are relying on "word of mouth". Finnish tourism information implementation on popular social media e.g. WeChat, Weibo and QQ can help expand information dissemination. In addition, traditional social media such as magazine and advertisements can be implemented as well. One good example can be give easily. The TV show 《Chef Nic》 season three's episode sixth was shot in Finland, which gained huge popularity from China. All of the interviewees mentioned this TV show somehow motivated them to visit Finland.

Besides digital information, well-developed transportation also plays an important part. Finnair promotion of direct fly from Guangzhou to Helsinki has attracted large amount to tourists to visit Finland from the start. The good accessibility of public transportation is a key to attract more Chinese FIT tourists. Since FIT travellers are not using any land operators, convenient public transportation helps them to travel around and enhance

travelling experience. According to the interview results, 27% of the respondents stated that it was quite confusing to travel with buses since the stops were not showing either from screen or broadcasting. Worse still, most of the signs were either in Finnish or Swedish. What can be done in the public transportation sector are making clear signs and in the future even can provide signs in Chinese. Bus needs to be equipped with stops showing screen or like metro, broadcasting stops.

Accommodation is one element that tourists consider carefully. According to the interview, most of the interviewees were only staying for a couple of hours or one day, accommodation was not mentioned. However, accommodation is one big sector in tourism revenue. In capital area, there are quite many high quality hotels like Radisson Blu hotels and Kämp hotels and budget-oriented hotels like Holiday Inn and Cumulus hotels. But based on hotel inspections the author has been to, besides cumulus hotels, the other hotels in Helsinki do not have Chinese services. Providing Chinese services enhance the travelling experiences, especially English penetration can be really low in the inland cities.

Food and drink sector is an important element. Very few of the interviewees have tried local restaurants and when asked about traditional Finnish food, some of them even had the answer of pizza. This indicates that traditional Finnish food, e.g. smoked salmon ought to be promoted. Especially for Chinese FIT travellers from coastal cities, they have strong preference for seafood. Also, with the large forest coverage rate, Finnish berries and juice are one selling points to Chinese tourists as well.

Based on the author's working experiences and culture background, the attractiveness of northern lights is one of the key reasons why Chinese FIT travellers visited Finland. According to Statistics Finland, the amount of Chinese overnights stays in Lapland is 3.1 million and these Chinese tourists were not attracted to the the ski resort but the northern lights. It is almost like an obsession and a must for them to see northern lights. The main reason why northern lights are so appealing to them is the belief that

it is the lights from heaven and they believe northern lights will have all kinds of positive effects on them. More promotion of northern lights on the Chinese market will trigger Chinese FIT tourists' desire of paying visit to Finland.

In long term planning, from 5-10 years, it should focus on sustainable economic growth in tourism industry. One way is to provide authentic experiences. More high-end tourism resources such as helicopter tour and more different types of glass igloos should be introducing to Chinese FIT travellers. By promoting and exposing to Chinese FIT travellers the relaxing lakeland experience and cottage life, these unique Finnish selling points will grow their popularities and more Finnish cities will be visited. Chinese personnel should be hired more in service sector, especially in restaurants and hotels. With the help of Chinese staff, Chinese travellers will feel more at ease.

7 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter summarize the information and findings gathered during the research. In addition, the answers to the research questions and sub-questions are presented. Also, reliability and validity of the study are presented to the reader as well as the suggestion for future research.

7.1 Answer to Research Questions

The main research question and the sub-questions were presented in the introduction. The author answers the sub-questions first in order to obtain a better answer for the main research question. This chapter presents the sub-questions and main research question respectively.

What is FIT travellers?

FIT travellers stands for Foreign Independent Tour travellers but nowadays it used as an acronym for Flexible Independent Travel travellers. FIT travel is a type of tourism that does not require any land operation providers. Land operation providers, also known as tour operator, is a company that makes arrangements for travel and places to stay, often selling these together as package. Being FIT travellers, visitors gain more freedom and flexibility on their own travelling plans. Nowadays it has become the mainstream of travelling.

What factors affect Chinese FIT travellers choosing Finland?

Firstly, Chinese tourist searching behaviour. According to the literature and empirical research, Chinese tourists rely on the “word of mouth” which means they always rely on their family and friends when choosing their destination. Friends and family’s opinion and recommendation are crucial to Chinese FIT travellers when they decide to travel to Finland or not.

Secondly, Chinese customer buying behaviour. “Face” and conformity are two major buying behaviours. “Face” in Asian countries is highly valued,

especially in China. “Face” can be associated with dignity, honor, prestige, one’s social status etc. When purchasing goods or services either for friends or relatives, Chinese consumers tend to choose those with appropriate value and particularly pay extra attention to product packaging. When it comes to travelling, those who are able to travel to the most popular destination, in this case Finland, will be envied by their friends and relatives which means they will gain more “face”. Conformity is defined as the tendency that people have to comply with the group norm while making decisions. It means that when consumer making choices of goods or services, it is likely that they want to be accepted or liked by certain groups or social networks. Same rules apply for Chinese tourists. When Finland is being promoted by TV shows or celebrities, Chinese tourists tend to travel there in order to fulfill their desire of being “cool” or envious by others and also fit in the mainstream.

What can be done to maintain and develop the market?

First of all, airline promotion. It is easily seen from the interview results that Finnair promotion of direct flight from Guangzhou to Helsinki has driven lots of FIT travellers to visit Helsinki. More direct flights promotion can be done to attract some other cities’ FIT travellers to pay a visit to Finland.

Secondly, familiarization of Finland. Finland is still a rare destination for most Chinese travellers, especially FIT travellers. Nowadays the quality of the customer journey is depending more and more the availability of digital information. Implements of the digital infrastructure are necessary when it comes to supporting information searching for FIT travellers. More people would travel to Finland when they have access to more information of Finland.

Thirdly, development of public transportation. The good accessibility of public transportation is a key to attract more Chinese FIT tourists. Since FIT travellers are not using any land operators, convenient public transportation helps them to travel around and enhance travelling experience.

Fourthly, accommodation. It is also one big sector in tourism revenue. In capital area, there are quite many high quality hotels like Radisson Blu hotels and Kämp hotels and budget-oriented hotels like Holiday Inn and Cumulus hotels. But based on hotel inspections the author has been to, besides cumulus hotels, the other hotels in Helsinki do not have Chinese services. Providing Chinese services enhance the travelling experiences, especially English penetration can be really low in the inland cities.

Fifthly, food and drinks. Based on the results of the interview, minority of the interviewees have tried local restaurants and when asked about traditional Finnish food, some of them even had the answer of pizza. This indicates that traditional Finnish food are less-known to Chinese FIT travellers. Traditional Finnish food such as e.g. smoked salmon ought to be promoted. Especially for Chinese FIT travellers from coastal cities, they have strong preference for seafood. Also, with the large forest coverage rate, Finnish berries and juice are one selling points to Chinese tourists as well.

Last but not least, the attractiveness of northern lights. According to the author's working experience in a travel agency and her Chinese culture background, the Chinese tourists' obsession with northern lights has been driven them to visit Finland, especially in Lapland. More promotion of northern lights on the Chinese market will trigger Chinese FIT tourists' desire of paying visit to Finland.

In the future, high-end travelling packages such as helicopter city tours and different types of glass igloos can be provided to fit more high-end customers' taste.

What are the key elements that attract Chinese FIT travellers to Finland and how to enhance Finland as an attractive tourist destination for Chinese FIT travellers?

The key elements that attract Chinese FIT travellers to Finland are recommendation by friends and family, Finnair promotion, attractiveness of

northern lights, well-developed public transportation, cruises stop, TV promotion and celebrities effect. In order to enhance Finland as an attractive tourist destination for Chinese FIT travellers, the key elements listed above need to be continuously maintained and promoted. Other than that, Finnish culture and its unique Sami culture, Finnish design, Finnish lakeland and cottage experience ought to be promoted more to appeal to more Chinese FIT travellers. Welcoming and helping more TV shows that make programmes about Finland can help Finland gain more popularity and better their reputation. When more tourists start visiting Finland, the others will follow due Chinese customers' buying conformity.

7.2 Validity and Reliability

The information for the research was collected from both primary sources and secondary sources. The primary data is collected through face-to-face street interview with total 52 respondents, which is a good size for qualitative research. The secondary data of the thesis was gathered from reliable sources such as scientific journals, government statistics and literatures. According to these factors, the research can be considered as valid and reliable.

7.3 Suggestions for future research

The goal of the study was to find out the key elements that attract Chinese FIT travellers to visit Finland and how to enhance the market. As it is mentioned in the beginning of the research, the study focused only on Chinese FIT customers who travel to Finland. For the future study, the author recommends to expand the target customer segments to other Asian countries' FIT travellers and how to enhance their markets.

8 SUMMARY

The aim of the thesis is to provide a deeper understanding of the key elements that affect Chinese FIT travellers' decision making on visiting Finland. The final goal is to provide a development plan for Visit Finland that could improve Finland as a desired destination for Chinese FIT travellers.

In the beginning of the study, the research introduces the basic theoretical concept of tourism industry, tourism marketing and marketing strategy. As the goal is to find out the key elements that affect Chinese FIT travellers' decision making on visiting Finland, the second chapter is conducted to look deeply into customer decision making process as well as buying behaviour.

Before conducting the empirical research, a chapter about countries study of both Finland and China is presented. In this chapter, the reader can gain a better understanding of how Finland is like as a tourism destination and what Chinese outbound tourism situation is. Also, it is followed by two subchapter regarding what Chinese tourist searching behaviour and buying behaviour are.

The researcher, participating in the Visit Finland project, want to find out the key elements that affect Chinese FIT travellers' decision making on visiting Finland and what can be done to enhance the market. Therefore, an empirical research is conducted on interviewing only Chinese FIT travellers. The interview revealed the key elements and the results of the interview are used as the sources of the development plan.

The development plan for Visit Finland provides suggestions on how to attract more Chinese FIT travellers and how to enhance its market. Also, the author's personal experiences of working in a travel agency and the theoretical data collected from literature and internet sources are used in the development plan.

The findings of the study stated, the key elements that affect Chinese FIT

travellers' decision making on visiting Finland are recommendation by friends and family, Finnair promotion, well-developed public transportation, cruises stop, TV promotion and celebrities effect. What can be done to enhance the market are promoting Finnish culture and its unique Sami culture, Finnish design, Finnish lakeland and cottage. Also, by taking advantage of Chinese customer's buying behaviour, welcoming and helping more TV shows that make programmes about Finland can help Finland gain more popularity and better their reputation.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1. Interview

您好！我是梁智敏，是来自芬兰旅游局的代表。请问您现在是否方便，能不能耽误您两分钟，我们正在做一个芬兰旅游局的街头采访。

热身问题：

1. 请问您是哪儿人？这次是自由行呢还是跟团过来的呀？
2. 您是这次是坐什么交通工具来芬兰？
3. 行程下一步是安排去哪个国家？
4. 您之前来过欧洲么？这次还打算去哪些国家？
5. 除了赫尔辛基市，您还去了芬兰别的城市吗？
6. 您已经在芬兰待多久时间了，这次计划待在芬兰多长时间？
7. 您这次是一个人还是跟家人朋友一块来？

主题问题：

8. 您为什么会选择芬兰？
9. 来的芬兰这段时间，您对芬兰最大的感受是什么？
10. 您有使用过赫尔辛基机场的服务么？（是）您觉得那里的标示清晰么？有什么还需要改善的地方吗？
11. 您怎么从机场过来市中心的？（标识）有没有遇到什么困难？（是否用过赫尔辛基交通卡）
12. （基于第 5 题）您在赫尔辛基 / 国家以外都是坐什么交通工具？觉得方便吗？对公共交通的服务有没有什么意见？
13. 个人自助游芬兰，您觉得整体上讲方便吗？（比如路标，交通费，地图使用等等）
14. 您觉得在赫尔辛基上网方便么？（国内套餐 / 芬兰本地服务）
15. 您在芬兰购物么？都买了什么？怎么付款？
16. 您对芬兰文化有了解吗？
17. 您有没有尝试过芬兰当地的饭馆？——> 都点了什么吃呢？感觉怎么样？ / 想尝试些什么菜？
18. 您有没有去过这边的博物馆？
19. 您有没有接触过当地的芬兰人？对他们的印象怎么样？
20. 您觉得中芬文化最大的差异是什么？

总结性问题：

21. 您觉得芬兰是不是一个理想的度假养生地，能否用一个词概括芬兰？
22. 展示 Finrelax 的插画，问题：有没有体验过图片中的这些活动？感觉如何？（如果下次来芬兰，最想体验哪个？）
23. 您这次回去会推荐朋友来芬兰旅游吗？最值得推荐的是什么？

APPENDIX 2. Interview Translated in English

Hi, my name is Zhimin Liang and I am the representative of Visit Finland. May I take up few minutes and do an interview with you? You may choose not to be recorded.

Warm-up questions:

1. Where are you from? Are you FIT traveller's or travelling with groups?
2. Are you travelling with your family or friends?
3. What kind of transportation you used to get here?
4. What is your next destination in this trip?
5. Have you been to Europe before? Which countries you have been to?
6. Besides Helsinki, are you planning to visit some other cities?
7. How long are you planning to stay in Finland? How long have you been in Finland already?

Main topics:

8. Why do you choose Finland as your destination?
9. Travelling as a FIT traveler in Finland, do you find it convenient in general? (signs, maps, etc.)
10. Have you used the airport services? Are the signs clear to you? (What could be improved in your opinion?)
11. How do you get to the city center from the airport?
12. Do you use any types of transportation in Helsinki? Is it convenient? Any comments?
13. How about internet connection in Helsinki?
14. Do you know anything about Finnish cultures?
15. Have you done some shopping in Finland? What have you bought/ What would you buy?
16. Which type of payment you prefer?

17. Have you tried any local restaurants?
18. Have you visited any museums?
19. Have you been interacted with any Finns? How do you feel about them?
20. What is the main difference between Chinese culture and Finnish culture?

Conclusion questions:

21. Can you describe your trip in Finland in one word? (impressed you or disappointed you)
22. Do you picture Finland as an ideal health resort? (showing FinRelax pictures)
23. Would you recommend your friends and family to travel to Finland? What would you recommend the most?

APPENDIX 3. Visit Finland Product Brochure-page 25

芬兰休闲游 (FinRelax) 给予客户 的承诺

- 原汁原味
- 土生土长
- 有机野生
- 纯粹自然
- 健康养生

1 芬兰桑拿

2 养生护理

3 纯净自然

4 静谧安详

5 闲适木屋

6 纯洁水质

